

Avoid veto vote; NH 7-21-11 revise water bill

How to best handle Lake Erie's future is proving to be no small task for state officials.

Gov. John Kasich vetoed a bill last week that would have allowed Ohio factories to pull more water out of Lake Erie, amid pressure from governors from other Great Lakes states who expressed concern about the measure, according to The Associated Press.

Kasich said in a statement that he was vetoing the bill because portions of it must be improved.

Under the bill, businesses would be able to take an average of 5 million gallons of water a day from Lake Erie over a 90-day period and 2 million gallons from rivers and groundwater feeding into the lake.

Companies that surpass that amount would need a permit. The bill would also create a water withdrawal regulatory program.

Environmental groups and former Republican Ohio Govs. Bob Taft and George Voinovich said the legislation could end up harming Lake Erie, the shallowest of the Great Lakes.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder expressed concern. Cuomo went so far as to suggest there could be legal action if Ohio's bill became law.

A report by the National Wildlife Federation was critical of the Ohio measure, saying it would allow for the region's most permissive withdrawal standards.

Supporters have argued that increased water use for businesses would bring new work to the state's industrial belt.

Senate President Tom Niehaus, a Republican, said in a statement that he was disappointed the administration — through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection Agency — didn't share any lingering problems with the measure while it was in the Senate.

House Speaker William Batchelder, a Republican, said the bill required earlier review from members of Kasich's cabinet than it had received, and he hoped to hold hearings again on the topic.

Batchelder did not say whether he planned to pursue an override of Kasich's veto, a process that would have to start in the House.

The legislation was aimed at aligning the state's goals with those of the Great Lakes Compact.

The eight states and two Canadian provinces adjoining the lakes negotiated the compact to prevent the region's water from being shipped or piped to arid regions.

The pact outlaws such diversions with rare exceptions.

It also requires the states to regulate their own large-scale withdrawals from the lakes, their tributary streams and underground sources.

We urge the House not to pursue a veto override.

Instead, we feel it best that all the parties involved — from the General Assembly to Kasich and those in his cabinet — go back to the drawing board to devise a bill that will adequately address all of Ohio's needs.

Certainly, our state, and specifically our region, would benefit from added jobs.

But as we've said in the past regarding an array of issues, we feel it's in Ohio's best interest to protect Lake Erie as its most valuable natural resource.

If allowing more water to be taken from the lake and its tributaries to add industrial jobs somehow crippled the state's tourism and recreational sectors, the endeavor would prove somewhat counterproductive.

Not to mention the lake should be protected as a source of drinking water as well as for the critical environmental role it plays.

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